

Section A-2

Family Readiness Groups (FRG)

The contents of this Toolkit have been developed to assist you in your efforts to support family readiness. Every effort has been made to ensure that the information provided is current and accurate. However, because statutory and regulatory changes may have occurred since the publication of this Toolkit, the Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Reserve Affairs cannot assume responsibility for its continued accuracy. Before taking any significant action based on the contents of this Toolkit, you should contact a subject matter expert in your chain of command to secure the most current information.

Family Readiness Groups (FRG)

Volunteer Management

Volunteers are often the foundation and most effective supporters of family readiness programs. Current family readiness programs are part of a long tradition of voluntary self-help in military life that dates back to the American Revolution. The basic idea behind family readiness and support groups is that service members and families benefit from helping one another cope with the rigors of the military lifestyle, the strains of frequent deployments, and the stress of family separations. For Guard and Reserve families the need for family support groups is strong – these families are forced to balance two often very different lifestyles and may live far from military support services and agencies. FRGs offer Guard and Reserve families essential services, but their ability to provide effective services is directly tied to their human resources. Volunteers are the only means of expanding limited FRG resources to meet the needs of the command. Creating and sustaining that essential volunteer workforce is as critical to mission capabilities as the recruitment and retention of military members.

Seeking volunteers for family readiness programs is an ongoing process. There are ways that everyone can participate and contribute to the group. Often it requires finding the correct match and the right volunteer position for each individual. Obtaining volunteers results largely from a willingness to ask the right people and an ability to offer something they can do. Generally, most individuals do not just volunteer. They want to know what they would be doing, how much time it will take, and what the expectations are.

Consider reasons why people are not volunteering. They may be new and do not know anyone. They may not feel qualified. Or it could be that no one has asked them. Provide an orientation and training.

The key to any successful volunteer group like an FRG is the way the volunteers are treated and organized. If the structure within which a volunteer works fills both the needs of the FRG and the individual, then it will be successful. Members of the FRG need to feel that they are able to contribute to the organization. In turn, they want to feel that the organization will be there to support them. There must be a conscious effort to generate interest in the concept and implementation of a FRG. An FRG exists as a command program. However, to be successful, members and volunteers must be interested in it and committed to it. If it is perceived that the FRG does not serve the needs of its members, it will be an organization in name only.

Volunteers are priceless. Volunteers are working for your program because they **want** to be there. They care about what the FRG is doing and have a level of motivation and commitment that cannot be bought. Volunteers bring unique skills, experience, creativity, and energy. The difficult task is keeping them there and sustaining and encouraging their motivation. There is no one ideal volunteer just as there is no one ideal volunteer program. Volunteers are valuable and they must be treated that way. Each volunteer is an individual with his or her own talents and

interests to bring to the FRG. The key is allowing them to contribute and finding the right match for their skills, time, and interest.

Volunteering is about inclusion – feeling a part of the unit. As a team member, volunteers can contribute much more than they can as individuals. The bonds and friendships they forge in the process make volunteering even more worthwhile. Volunteers must be made to feel part of the team despite any individual differences.

The unit must be fully committed to the use and value of volunteers from the commander down. The success of an FRG is often directly proportional to the amount of resources (including financial), energy, and time that the unit devotes to its volunteers. Help to cover child care costs if possible, or offer a location where spouses can bring their children. Financial resources are needed to cover administrative needs, equipment, and to recognize the efforts of the volunteers. For FRGs, financial resources often come from fundraising.

Essential components for an effective FRG volunteer program include:

- Communication
- Flexibility
- Recruitment
- Job descriptions
- Retention
- Training
- Recognition

Clear, concise, communication is fundamental to any unit FRG. Volunteers must know what is going on in the organization and what is expected of them. Communicate with FRG members through telephone calls, e-mail, newsletters, and most importantly face-to-face.

The FRG should be flexible to accommodate the needs and interests of others. The unit will change when the leadership changes. Not every volunteer is capable of, or interested in, doing the same job. For example, with a fundraiser, a volunteer may not like to bake, but they might offer to design a flyer or make telephone calls to other families.

Why do people volunteer? There are numerous reasons. They volunteer because they care about the unit; they want to make a difference; it's a personal skill or interest; they have friends who volunteer with the program; they are seeking fulfillment and challenge; and they want to meet people and make friends.

What are the common reasons for not volunteering? Commonly cited reasons include:

- Not having enough time

- Preconceived negative opinions about your program from current or former volunteers
- An unwillingness to make a big time commitment
- Inability to come when you need them
- Fear of the unknown

Consider those reasons for not volunteering. What can you do as a leader to work on their concerns? Make it easy to volunteer!

Leader attitude sets the tone for volunteers. Attitude is contagious. Successful leaders look for the best in people and for ways to continually improve their programs. Commanders who set a positive tone and advocate for their program, have volunteers who work harder and convey a positive message to all those involved that they feel they are members of a winning team.

Volunteer recruitment and retention, job descriptions, training, and recognition are discussed in subsequent sections.